

the Control Room of Delhi Fire Serve at about 7.00 P.M. that a fire had broken out in Gandhi Gali-in Sadar Bazaar. The fire tenders from the nearest fire station were rushed to the spot immediately. The fire fighting operations were handicapped because of the congested locality which did not permit easy access to the fire tenders. Moreover, the shops in the market deal with a variety of plastics and chemicals, some of which are highly inflammable. The fire was declared as major and further re-enforcement rushed to the spot. The fire fighting operations were conducted with the help of 13 water jets and water supply was maintained from an underground tank.

Additional fire tenders from the defence authorities and neighbouring States were obtained and pressed into service. The fire was finally brought under control early in the morning, but it is quite likely that it will keep on smouldering for some time. Sufficient number of engines have been kept as stand-by at the spot. The cause of the fire is under police investigation. While the cause of fire would be known only after the necessary police investigation, there is no evidence so far of any sabotage.

I have given instructions to the authorities concerned to review the fire fighting arrangements in Delhi to determine their adequacy and state of preparedness. Delhi Administration would also go into the question of the adequacy of fire fighting equipment for high-rise buildings and new developments that have taken place in the Delhi urban areas, especially the congested localities and the densely populated areas. A programme will also be undertaken to create greater awareness and public consciousness of the dangers of such fires and the precautions that should be taken by the various interests

15.04 1/2 hrs.

STATEMENT BY MINISTER

Fire incident in Adarsh Nagar on
17.4.1990

[English]

THE MINISTER OF HOME AFFAIRS
(SHRI MUFTI MOHAMMAD SAYEED):

There was a fire at about 5.12 A.M. today in jhuggis at Adarsh Nagar near Azadpur Subzi Mandi. 14 fire engines were pressed into service immediately. The fire was brought under control at 5.55 A.M., but fire was extinguished at 6.20 A.M. The extent of damage and number of huts gutted is being ascertained. The cause of fire is under police investigation.

[English]

(Interruptions)

MR. CHAIRMAN: Honourable Members, I am constrained by the convention of the House to not permit clarifications. However, I am mindful of the concern of so many hon. Members and I would, therefore, give opportunity, not to everyone. Please decide amongst yourselves as to who is to express concern. It is the collective concern of the House and I would give an opportunity to express concern. Thereafter, without setting any precedent in the House, I would leave it to the discretion of the hon. Home Minister, whether he wishes to respond to any of the observations that the hon. Members make or does not wish to respond. I will start with Shri Chidambaram.

[Translation]

SHRI MADAN LAL KHURANA (South Delhi): Mr. Chairman, Sir, my request was that...

MR. CHAIRMAN: Please be seated. I shall listen to everybody's request.

SHRI MADAN LAL KHURANA: My submission is that the hon. Minister went for an on-the-spot assessment of the situation. So if he wants to add anything to what he has already said, he may do so.

[English]

MR. CHAIRMAN: It is for the Government to decide that.

SHRIP. CHIDAMBARAM (Sivaganga) Sir, yesterday was 'Fire Services Day.' It is a day in the year when the Fire Service, look back upon their work, reflect upon what they have achieved and there is all-round commendations and praise and that was the day on which two major fires and one—from what appears from the Home Minister's Statement—minor fire broke out in Delhi. The Home Minister should have answered or tried to answer in his Statement, a number of questions which arise from this morning's newspaper reports and other reports. Firstly, the Home Minister quotes unnamed witnesses of having told him or his Government that a short circuit causes the fire, but the newspapers carry Mr Dheri's observations and comments. Mr Dheri is the Chief Fire Officer. Why does the Home Minister not even refer to Mr Dheri's observations? If he can quote unnamed sources, why can he not recognise his own Chief Fire Officer's observations? Secondly, the DGP, IGP Conference was going on in Vigyan Bhawan. The Commissioner of Police says that while the Conference was on, they noticed the spark and some smoke. Then, we have another statement of the Commissioner of Police that he returned to the scene of fire at about 2.30 p.m. or 3.30 p.m. What happened in between? After senior Police Officers of this country noticed the short circuit and noticed the fire, did they just abandon the place and run away?

SHRI SOMNATH CHATTERJEE (Bolpur) It is not fair on their part

SHRI P. CHIDAMBARAM I am asking this question you are not answering. I hope

Thirdly, the Home Minister's Statement does not disclose the fact that according to first report given by the Chief Fire Officer and the Police to the Government the fire was brought under control. Another fire started at 2.00 a.m. this morning. The Home Minister's Statement jumps from the first fire to the second fire and in fact, tries to dovetail both fires and say, it was a minor fire which was declared as a major fire at 2.00 a.m. Everybody in Delhi knows, everybody in that area

knows that at 2.00 a.m., there was a major crash when the roof fell down and a big blaze, bigger than the blaze that was seen yesterday evening, which consumed all the rooms of Vigyan Bhawan. The Home Minister's Statement does not make any reference to the state of Vigyan Bhawan. Is the entire building now gutted by fire or is that building renovatable? Is it possible to do small repairs or big repairs or had the entire building to be put up now? Nothing is mentioned in the Home Minister's Statement. I am constrained to observe that we have more information from newspapers than from the hon. Home Minister.

Then, Sir, is the Delhi Fire Service equipped to deal with two major fires on the same day? One major fire was on Vigyan Bhawan and the other major fire was at Sadar Bazar. Were they equipped to deal with two major fires? He mentioned having drawn upon equipment and fire tenders and neighbouring States. He does not say which States helped him, when they helped him, whether there was delay. Was the delay which was there because of lack of equipment to deal with two major fires? Now what happens in future, when may be two or three major fires in Delhi. Delhi is a major metropolitan city today with a population of 80 lakhs. If you cannot deal with two major fires and if you have to draw upon equipment and personnel from neighbouring States, then what is the state of your fire services?

Finally, for the last several years, including the years when the Congress was in power and ruling the country, the major complaint has been that there are many buildings in Delhi which did not conform to the requirement of the Fire Service. My colleague, Mr Sontosh Mohan Dev was dealing with the subject. I know, notices were issued to as many as 185 buildings—most of them were Government buildings. Now, the Home Minister has appointed a committee—if I am wrong, he may correct me—consisting of three officers who were part of this establishment during the period of 5 to 10 years, namely, the former officer in-charge of Civil Defence, the former Chief Fire Adviser. It is

the very officers in whose tenure these 185 buildings were either put up or in whose tenure these 185 buildings were found defective. So, what is the point of asking these very officers to report and comment upon the Services? Would you not call upon the experts from outside, from other States to do it?

I say, there is not much in the Statement. This statement does not really reflect the gravity of the situation. I think, the Home Minister should come forward tomorrow with a statement which reflects the gravity of the situation.

SHRI VAKKOM PURUSHOTHAMAN (Alleppey): I want only half-a-minute.

MR. CHAIRMAN: I must make it very clear that I am not setting a new precedent. It is up to the Hon. Home Minister to respond. I will give you half-a-minute. But I will caution the hon. Members that I cannot have an *impromptu* discussion on this. It is only in recognition of your concern that I am permitting the Members to voice their concern.

SHRI VAKKOM PURUSHOTHAMAN: This fire in Vigyan Bhavan had started at 3.30 p.m. yesterday. But this morning when I went out for the morning walk, I saw flames and smokes in Vigyan Bhavan. I went near the building. I was obstructed by the police. Then, I said, I am a Member of Parliament and I wanted to know what is happening there. I went near Vigyan Bhavan. Even at 6 o'clock this morning, Vigyan Bhavan was in fire. What happened to the fire brigade? Have they become so inefficient? Even at 6 O'clock, the fire was there and the fire brigade was not there. Why the fire could not be extinguished till this morning? (*Interruptions*)

[*Translation*]

SHRI J.P. AGARWAL (Chandni Chowk): Mr. Chairman Sir, I am from Delhi and so I should be given an opportunity to speak.

MR. CHAIRMAN: You shall certainly get an opportunity to express your views, Hon. Shri Malhotra is also from Delhi. I can

understand you feelings.

SHRI VIJAY KUMAR MALHOTRA (Delhi Sadar): Sir, the hon. Home Minister said that the Lt. Governor has ordered an inquiry into the Vigyan Bhavan fire and the Delhi Administration has been given necessary of directions as far as the fire in Sadar Bazaar is concerned. Would it not have been better to set up an inquiry committee for the Sadar Bazaar fire which was perhaps of a more serious nature? Previously too there have been incidents of fire over there and this is the third or fourth time that a fire has broken out in that area. The wiring in those localities is faulty resulting in a potentially explosive situation. It would have been most appropriate to have set up an independent inquiry committee to suggest steps to prevent the recurrence of such accidents.

A fire incident in which 40-50 fire tenders have to be used is called a major fire. What are the arrangements at the Administration's command if unfortunately, two major fires break out at the same time in Delhi? In the most recent case, the position was such that when the fire broke out in Sadar Bazaar all the fire tenders were engaged in extinguishing the Vigyan-Bhavan fire. This led to a one hour delay in reaching fire control assistance to Sadar Bazaar. Almost four hours later, fire tenders were sought from Faridabad, Mathura and the Defence authorities. Can we afford to wait for four hours when such a situation arises in a city like Delhi? It is absolutely essential that fire fighting measures should be up-to-date in a city such as Delhi. Yesterday the hon. Home Minister said that the country must be in a state of preparedness for a possible confrontation with Pakistan. Will this be the level of preparation that we should be incapable of controlling two major fires at the same time in the capital city of the country? To overcome such a situation, special arrangement must be made for Delhi.

Thirdly, I want to say that the hon. Home Minister's statement does not mention anything about rehabilitation measures for those affected by the fire. Nothing has been men-

[Sh. Vijay Kumar Malhotra]

tioned about taking immediate steps to rehabilitate those affected by the fire honouring their claims or granting them loans at low rates of interest to re-open their shops and establishments, as it may take months to clear the debris from there.

SHRI J.P. AGARWAL (Chandni Chowk): Sir, I would like to raise 2-3 points. The hon. Home Minister has not mentioned the number of shops gutted in the Sadar Bazaar fire. Nearly 700 shops were gutted when fire tenders reached the spot (*Interruptions*)

SHRIMADAN LAL KHURANA: The local people were saying that you did not reach the spot. (*Interruptions*)

SHRI J.P. AGARWAL: You are wrong. It is not proper on your part to level such allegations. This is really bad. The stock of water had exhausted by the time the fire tenders reached the spot, so water could not be sprayed on the burning structures. Thirdly, they did not have the full fire fighting equipment with them. Instead of spraying water to extinguish the fire that was burning the shops they sprayed water on the adjacent buildings thus making the accident more serious.

Another thing I want to point out is that after a fire broke out the first time in that area, the insurance companies refused to insure those shops. Today a local shopkeeper is unable to insure his shop because insurance companies do not entertain his application. This is a very strange situation. There is no provision for compensation for the losses which run into crores of rupees. According to the bye-laws, they cannot construct buildings and the banks will not give them loans. So the crores of rupees in losses bears down heavily on them. The hon. Home Minister's statement does not mention all these points.

Fourthly, the inquiry committee which had been set up earlier had given certain suggestions which were agreed upon by the Delhi Administration. But till now, not a single suggestion has been implemented. Even

today fire brigade pipes do not have water as they remain clogged at places as a result of road repair work. Water does not flow in these pipes. I would like to know why the suggestion were not implemented.

SHRI L.K. ADVANI (New Delhi): Mr. Chairman, Sir, I fail to understand why enquiry of only one incident has been ordered. It is not good. Today when I went to Sadar Bazar, the general impression in that area was that adequate attention could not be paid to the fire accident which took place there only because full attention had been concentrated on Vigyan Bhavan fire. I visited Vigyan Bhavan yesterday at about 7.0' clock. At that time, about 35-40 fire tenders were there, out of which only 12 were in use and the rest were perhaps, not required.

The fire at Sadar Bazar broke out at 7.00 or 6.30. It is said that the first fire tender reached the spot after about one hour. I do not know whether it is true. But such an impression among the people is not good. As Vigyan Bhavan was a prestigious building, the Government paid maximum attention to it whereas least attention was paid to human lives, shops and those who were ruined. The concerned officials of that area met me and denied this. However, it would be appropriate to hold enquiry of both the accidents so that we can look into the problem in the proper context.

I agree that it is necessary to provide compensation to those who suffered loss in Sadar-Bazar.

SHRI MADAN LAL KHURANA (South Delhi): The Union Minister, Shri Paswan also accompanied us and just now we have returned from the site. We put some demands before him on behalf of the people of that area which he has accepted. The Lieutenant Governor was also there. I would request the hon. Minister of Home Affairs to inform us about the latest position. I would like to submit that the number of shops destroyed in the fire is 800 and not 700. People were asking why Shri Jai Prakashji did not come...

SHRI J.P. AGARWAL: You should not stoop so low.

SHRI MADAN LAL KHURANA: Mr. Chairman, Sir, there is nothing wrong in it. About 800 shops have been gutted in the fire in Sadar Bazar. That market is a whole sale market and if we take that commodities worth Rs. 10 lakhs were there in each shop, the total loss comes to about Rs. 80 crores. It was a major fire which has not been extinguished even now. My submission is that because of two major factors- which even the officials admit-one that the electric connections could not be snapped immediately, because the officials were not present and secondly because of non availability of water, the fire could not be controlled. The Investigation should not be restricted merely to two fire accidents. In my view, fire accidents in Rajouri Garden Telephone Exchange and Rajendra Place also should be investigated. Shri Paswan may kindly make an announcement to this effect in the House.

KUMARI UMA BHARATI (Khajuraho): Mr. Chairman, Sir, I would like to submit that yesterday when fire broke out in Vigyan Bhavan, I went there in the evening. There I came to know that though there was lack of adequate fire fighting equipment, the fire brigade had fought it bravely and in the process, two firemen received severe burn injuries. One thing about which I am extremely concerned is that a few minutes before the fire broken out in the Vigyan Bhavan building a meeting of Directors General of Police and Intelligence Bureau had come to a close. Alongwith me crores of people in the country suspected that there may be a conspiracy behind the fire accident when we came to know about it from the TV news yesterday. Probably, there could be a conspiracy as high officials were attending the meeting. The fire broke out just after the meeting was over. May be cause of wrong timings. The conspiracy could not succeed because of wrong timings and the fire spread as soon as the meeting was over. In view of these speculations, it would be better if the Minister of Home Affairs gives a clarification in this regard. Does he suspect something or

is he trying to hide something by saying that it was just a short circuit and nothing else.

[English]

SHRI H.K.L. BHAGAT (East Delhi): Mr. Chairman, I thank you very much, very kind of you. The whole thing that has happened is a matter of deep shock and concern to all of us. Every citizen of this country is shocked because of this fire accident in Vigyan Bhavan. It is such a prestigious building. It is an internationally prestigious building. We all know that it was the late Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru who was responsible for creating that building. It was again renovated at the time of NAM. Such a thing is really shocking indeed. I do not take any partisan view of it. I refuse to take it. I do not want to put the Government into any unnecessary embarrassment also. That is not my approach at all. I do not want to claim any political gludge on it either. I only wish to understand from the Home Minister that since they have ordered a departmental inquiry, will the Minister be able to find out, from the departmental inquiry, as to how such a big thing has happened. Last night, I think, BJP MPs were also there. We were also there in the other fire also in Sadar Bazar. There also, I saw things myself and they have also gone into these things. Then these bomb blasts in the police stations...

MR. CHAIRMAN: We are not on bomb blasts.

SHRI H.K.L. BAGAT: I only want to understand whether the Home Minister if satisfied that with a mere departmental inquiry he shall be able to find out the truth.

[Translation]

SHRI TARIF SINGH (Outer Delhi): Mr. Chairman, Sir, fire accidents are becoming a regular feature in Delhi and often we come across news of fire accidents. Sometimes, it is a jhuggi jhonpri colony or PVC market; sometimes it is Sadar Bazar and now it is Vigyan Bhavan. Our fire services are not fully equipped to control the situation,

[Sh. Tarif Singh]

because multi storeyed and high-rise buildings are coming up very fast. In remote areas adequate arrangements should be made if crops are destroyed in fire and adequate compensation should also be provided for the loss.

SHRIJANARDAN TIWARI (Siwan): Mr. Chairman, Sir, Pakistan is involved in this fire accident. Terrorists are involved in it. It is happening everywhere. They have been doing it in a planned manner. This aspect should also be considered during the enquiry that Pakistan is behind it. That is all what I have to say.

[English]

SHRI S. BENJAMIN (Bapatla): Mr. Chairman, Sir, you know in Kashmir, after the incident of Vice-Chancellor...

MR. CHAIRMAN: We are limiting it to Delhi.

SHRI S. BENJAMIN: The house to house search was made. From the papers we are learning that militants have dispersed...

MR. CHAIRMAN: We are not on Kashmir. We are on the question of Delhi. We are not on Kashmir.

(Interruptions)

SHRI S. BENJAMIN: These militants have struck throughout the country and as a result of which, there is a food poisoning case at one place and a short-circuit in another place and again a fire accident in another place. Can there be action? Because of the dispersal of those militants, these things are happening. This is the general impression created in this country. Will the Minister rather make his statement relevant?

SHRI SONTOSH MOHANDEV (Tripura West): I had the opportunity to go through

this Gopala Tower Inquiry Report and some of its recommendations. On the basis of that we had replied in the past in both the Houses. As rightly pointed out by my colleague, there are recommendations for 183 buildings including the Government buildings, private buildings and hotels. All that I request the hon. Minister is that the fire brigade can check it if the corrective steps are taken. But the Government of India and its respective departments refused to give funds or finance the repair of these buildings as per the norms suggested by this Committee. Kindly look into this aspect. Otherwise, many more discussions will be there in this House. Kindly go through this Report and its recommendations and the buildings. Otherwise, any more accidents will occur.

[Translation]

MR. CHAIRMAN: Shri Ram Vilas, would you like to ask something?

THE MINISTER OF LABOUR AND WELFARE (SHRI RAM VILAS PASWAN): Mr. Chairman, Sir, I have nothing special to say. The Minister of Home Affairs has informed us about everything. He will give us more information. Shri Madan Lal Khurana also made some remarks. Today, I visited Sadar Bazar, Adarsh Nagar and Vigyan Bhavan along with the Lt. Governor of Delhi and Shri Khurana. The hon. Minister has already informed that an enquiry has been ordered in this regard. Relief of Rs. 500/- has been announced for the affected people in the jhuggi-jhonpari area of Adarsh Nagar. Rs. 250/- will be paid to those whose bicycles etc. have been burnt. Yesterday, I saw that a small girl was burnt terribly. Some people had their hands burnt. An announcement has been made that the next of kin of those who have died will be given Rs. 10,000/- and the people who have sustained burns will be given Rs. 2,500/-. We went to Sadar Bazar also. The people of that area made two components in particular—first that the electric wiring in that area was pretty old and the accident took place only due to old wiring. In this regard, the Delhi Administration and we assured them that new wiring would

be provided there so that such incidents may not recur. The Second complaint was related to insurance. The persons who had got their assets insured should be given the insured amount at the earliest and the others should be given loans etc. The Government will not only take these two matters into consideration but also implement them expeditiously.

[English]

MR. CHAIRMAN: Before I call upon the hon. Home Minister I must make it very clear yet again that I am setting no new convention in the House; it is up to the Home Minister to respond to the observations of the hon. Members or not to respond.

There is yet another clarification I would like to make. Now that the hon. Members have had a chance to express their concern about this, there will be no further discussion on this very same matter again in the House.

[Translation]

SHRI J.P. AGARWAL (Chandni Chowk): Mr. Chairman, Sir, whether Call Attention or a discussion under Rule 193 would be allowed on this issue after that.

[English]

SHRI MUFTI MOHAMMAD SAYEED: There are some basic questions because of these fire accidents. As the hon. Members said, it was a small fire which converted into a major fire. About the fire preventive measures which have been taken and as far as the efficiency of fire fighting force—how they dealt with it—is concerned; all these matters will be looked into and enquired into by the high powered committee which has been appointed by the Government.

The Lt. Governor has appointed it and it is a time-bound committee. Within one month the Committee has to submit its report. Whether it was the result of a sabotage, whether it was the result of electric short-circuit for whether it was or some other

reason; all these matters are to be looked into by the Committee.

Secondly, about the Sadar Bazar incident, the contention of the hon. Members is that it is a congested locality. 20 fire fighting tenders were sent there. The emergency was like that, if you could get it from Haryana or other neighbouring places there is no reason why not to bring it from there. I see that the same Committee will enquire into whatever is the cause of this fire. The same Committee will be given the job to see what preventive measures can be taken.

As far as the assessment of damage is concerned, how much damage has been caused to Vigyan Bhawan, whether the building can be renovated, etc.; that assessment is being made and in one or two days we will get it.

About the planning of Sadar Bazar, I am told generally the shop-keepers do have insurance policy. Anyhow the area is very congested. If we want to rehabilitate it, we shall have to plan that market in a different way so that again nothing like that happens. I was told by the fire fighting officers that because of the congestion of the locality they were not able to reach the fire tenders there.

I assure the hon. Members that whatever precautionary measures are to be taken, they will be taken. We have some deficiencies. In all the buildings which have been constructed by the Government, adequate fire prevention measures have not been taken. We have to review it and see that all the buildings, whoever constructed them, will adhere to certain norms.

SHRI SOMNATH CHATTERJEE: What happened to the earlier Committee? There was a report by another Committee and Shri Dev referred to that. Was that report opened earlier? (Interruptions) Was any action taken by anyone? (Interruptions)

SHRI MUFTI MOHAMMAD SAYEED: We have to go into that report. (Interruptions)

MR CHAIRMAN Thank you, Mr Home Minister With the consensus of the House, we, now have to proceed with the discussion on the Demands for Grants in respect of the Ministry of Human Resource Development (*Interruptions*)

PROF P J KURIEN (Mavelikera) Why did you appoint those persons to conduct the inquiry, who were responsible for constructing these buildings without sufficient precautions to prevent fire?

(*Interruptions*)

SHRI MUFTI MOHAMMAD SAYEED They are all very well-known officers men of integrity men of vision They have done good service They are all officers of great calibre and integrity We should not doubt their integrity (*Interruptions*)

MR CHAIRMAN I am sorry I cannot let the House to go on with conversation We have to proceed with the discussion and voting on the Demands for Grants in respect of the Ministry of Human Resource Development Now Shri Nand Kumar Sai to continue

DEMANDS FOR GRANTS (GENERAL)
1990-91 MINISTRY OF HUMAN RE
SOURCE DEVELOPMENT - *CONTD*

SHRI NAND KUMAR SAI (Raigarh) Mr Chairman Sir I was saying that we should popularise sports in the villages The sports talent available in the villages should be brought forward in national competitions so that our level of sports could rise Sir as I said earlier, during the last 40 years after the independence there have been concerted efforts to cause harm to our culture, there have been efforts to discourage it Just a while ago we were talking about incidents of fire The Vigyan Bhawan caught fire and there was fire in Sadar Bazar causing widespread damage to property in both the incidents But I want to tell you about the fire that has been set to our culture and to the unity

and integrity of our country Under the existing education policy the English language which was introduced by Lord Macaulay is being taught with a view to making its use as a spoken language But that has not been the case with Sanskrit which is being taught on grammatical considerations I would like to request the hon Minister to make Sanskrit compulsory from primary to higher classes and it should not be taught from grammatical considerations but as a spoken language. One can pick up grammar automatically But the people who evolved the education policy, deliberately make Sanskrit, a language not to be taught as a spoken one Some one said that it is a dead language Besides, Sanskrit was propagated as a difficult language In this way, efforts were made to lead us away from our culture

15.37 hrs.

[SHRI VAKKAM PURUSHOTHAMAN *in the Chair*]

I would, therefore, like to request you to make study of Sanskrit compulsory There have also been distortions in the history When we study history, we are told that the Aryans came from outside India We are also taught in the schools that our ancestors came from outside and ruled over India Efforts have also been made to interpret that the Britishers, though outsiders, should rule over India just as the Aryans coming from outside India ruled over the country But it is totally wrong Great poet Prasad has replied this point in his following description of India

"Jatiyan ka utthan patan andhiyan jhadi
prachand samir,
Khare dekha jhela hanste pralaya ke
ham pale hue vir,
Kisi ka hamne chhina nahin pralaya ka
raha palna yahin,
Hamari janmabhoori thi yahin kahin
se ham aye the nahin "

We should do this Let the history be re-written The history, now being taught to children is not correct It should be written against What is our base and what is our